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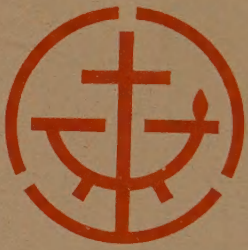

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LECTURES ON

THE EPISTLES TO THE

THESSALONIANS.

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LECTURES

ON THE EPISTLES TO THE

THESSALONIANS.

BY

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OF BERESFORD, LONDON,

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(*From a Hearer's Notes.*)

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First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

Introduction.

THERE are three leading lines of truth in the New Testament Epistles, as given by the inspired writers, Paul, Peter, and John.

Paul deals with the Gospel of God, the heavenly calling, the seating of the saints with Christ in the heavenlies, and the Church.

Peter views the children of God as down here in the wilderness, passing along to the rest beyond, guarded and kept by the power of God.

John treats of the family of God, and shews how the children are related to the Father, to each other, and to the world.

Each of the seven Epistles addressed by Paul to the Gentile churches, has a distinct subject, for God never repeats Himself. When this is observed and apprehended, then the reader of the Word will see how that subject is opened out piece by piece by the Holy Ghost, in each Epistle. It will also be seen that the subject is mentioned in Paul's writings, at least, near the beginning of each of his letters.

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Romans is occupied with "the Gospel of God," which expression occurs in chap. i. 1.

The *Corinthian* Epistles instruct us concerning the Church, the assembly of saints, and are so addressed. (See 1 Cor. i. 2 : 2 Cor. i. 2.)

Galatians warns against "another Gospel," (chap. i. 6,)—the admixture of law and grace, Judiasm and Christianity.

Ephesians treats of the Church in the heavenlies, the body of Christ, the highest picture of Pauline teaching.

Philippians views the saints as pressing on to the mark of God's calling up on high, through God working in them, the path marked out for them as in chap. ii., chap. i. 6, being an epitome of the entire Epistle.

Colossians shews the fulness of the Head, the Lordship of Christ, and warns against the traditions of men, which detract from Christ.

Thessalonians crowns all, by directing us to the coming One. The subject appears in every chapter. In the first Epistle, His coming for His saints; in the second, His appearing with His saints, and interposition by judgment on things below. May the Lord exercise our hearts and make them burn with love to Him, as we read and meditate on this grand and intensely practical theme.

Chapter I.

THE word "Thessalonians" means "Those who win the victory," so at the end we are exhorted to put on the "breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation."

Verse 1.—"Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus," are here all called apostles, (chap. ii. 6). Silvanus is the same as Silas, (Acts xvii. 1-14). "In God the Father." There is not another Epistle so worded. What a wonderful expression! We too are "In God the Father." Is it not wonderful? Never forget it. That is the right way of looking at other Christians. "In God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Why is it said so? Some think because they were advanced Christians, others because they were babes in Christ, young converts. This is more likely, but it is my opinion that this Epistle contemplates us as very near the end. So God looks at the things from the beginning again, and sees how His people were then on His heart, and on Christ's heart; sees their position before Him, how dear they were from the beginning, and thus they are said to be "In God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."

These words remind us of John x. 28, 29. "In My hand, in My Father's hand:" doubly secure. "Grace

be unto you and peace." This expression is mentioned at the beginning of all the Epistles. We must not be tired of reading it, if our Heavenly Father says it. May we have the spiritual appetite to enjoy the words every time we read them. He must have a reason for saying it so many times, "Grace and peace." By nature our hearts are strangers to both. We know the words very well, but what do we know of the things? Have you got established in "grace and peace?" It implies we have a great deal to learn about His "grace and peace" yet. 'Grace and peace" are not just the same. First, Grace. God is doing everything to us and for us, without our desert at all. Next Peace. To establish us in the confidence of His love. May our hearts get more and more steeped in the peace He is so desirous we should enjoy.

Verse 2.—"We give thanks to God, always for ȳou all." A beautiful trait in the divine life is, to rejoice in the *spiritual* prosperity of others. It is the work of a shepherd to mourn over the naughtiness and wilfulness of his flock, and to rejoice when he sees them "growing in grace.

"Making mention of you in our prayers." Giving thanks and praying for others. How often the apostle tells the saints of this. What a heart he had! Are we thus unselfish, and do we pray for the "growth in grace" of others, even those we have not seen?

Verse 3.—"Remembering *without ceasing*," etc. Then later, "Pray *without ceasing*." (Ch. v. 17). So we get

the words twice, at the beginning and at the end. It is so easy to remember one another's bad qualities; the Lord save us from all that. Do you think the Thessalonians were all like Paul or John? Oh, no. I daresay they were just the same sort of Christians we meet with now. And what does he remember? First, their "work of faith," that is, work, the result of faith. "Labour of love," that is work constrained by love, the knowledge of God's love. If we say we love God, what are we doing for Him? "Patience of hope," toiling on patiently, waiting for the Master's coming, "all in the sight of God the Father." There is a great deal of work not done under the eye of God. It is a very searching thought, though a very precious expression. It is a very blessed position to be in. "He gives to every man his work." What a blessed thing. It is possible to work without it being the "work of faith," or to labour without its being the "labour of love." There is a striking variation in the words to the church of Ephesus in Rev. ii. 2. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience."

The same words are there, only they are clipped. There was something lacking. Better do a *little with faith* than a great deal with bustle and noise, and much that men admire. Supposing the Ephesian church and the Thessalonian were compared outwardly, they would appear just the same. But how did the Omnipotent One see them? Faith, love, hope, cut off in the one. Let us be solicitous that our works be the "works of faith,"

our labour the "labour of love," and our patience the "patience of hope." In Thessalonians "work," in Rev ii. 2, "works," perhaps a deal more externally, but not in the sight of the great Being, "God and our Father." This shows us we are to do our work to please Him, and that the motives that move us are all known to Him. The hidden springs are under His eye. Then in 1 Peter i. 17, we learn, that the Father's eye is ever on our work.

Verse 4.—"Knowing brethren beloved, your election of God." We cannot begin that way; God does. We begin by finding out that we are sinners; then we find out whether Christ is the Saviour of sinners such as we are, after we know our salvation secure, we can look back and know our election, and look forward to the glory. Election is the work of God. God began it, it is all of Him together. If we look within, there is plenty to distress us; if we look around, there is plenty to humble us, but if we look at God, and at Christ on the throne, there is plenty to rejoice in. Ah! we little knew once what God had done for us, what thoughts He had toward us; that our names were in the Book of Life, that we were given to Christ, before the world began.

Verse 5.—"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, in much assurance." What is the difference between the three? When the Word is pressed on the spirit with power, it is a proof that the Holy Ghost is present; much assurance, increasing power. We need this, not only in public but

in private. We should have our ears and hearts so open that the Word may come like precious things from another world, so that we may feed upon it.

Verse 6.—"Imitators of us and of the Lord," true marks of conversion. "Having received the Word in much affliction." If there is not open opposition in these days there will be covert opposition. We need to be on our guard against the devil as a serpent, if not, as a roaring lion. If we are not drawn away with the fascinations around, we shall find the world's hostility as real as ever it was, only here is the comfort. "With joy in the Holy Ghost." God will never let His people suffer, without at the same time giving them joy. We may have joy in the Holy Ghost before the suffering, but we may be sure if we are called to suffer shame or loss for His Name's sake, to have His presence and His joy amid it all.

Verses 7, 8.—"Ye became ensamples." How? It is explained in verse 8, "Your faith to God-ward." This is the distinctive mark of a Christian. Every creature must have a centre; if below God, he is a loser. If God in Christ is the centre, he is ennobled. "Faith to God-ward." What a beautiful position for a Christian! God ever present in the minutest details of life, in every circumstance. As the Psalmist says, "I have set the Lord always before me." It is a life-long lesson to learn, to bring God into our daily lives. We come to know a Friend we never knew before, and this knowledge of

God and of Christ we already have, is to be eternal. He knows us well enough, but we don't know Him well enough, so we are to grow in acquaintance with Him. We learn first His love, but now we have to *do* with Him, learn gradually all that there is in Him, all His holiness, purity, and we don't want God in anywise altered, but just as He is. "Your faith God-ward." What does the world say of the mass of professors? With the great majority, the very name provokes a curl of the lip. What about ourselves? Could they talk of our "faith God-ward?" Of our joy in the Holy Ghost? It was the *lives* of these people the world noticed, and the question is, whether this is the testimony which those who have to do with us would be able to give. It is an easy Christianity now-a-days. Of course it is possible to get sorrow and affliction through our own inconsistencies. If we suffer, let us see to it that it is for the testimony we are bearing to Christ. May it be our "faith to God-ward." In Acts xvii., where we get an account of the Gospel's introduction to Thessalonica, we read that the unconverted soon took notice of Jason and the others. Their lives were different. God grant it may be so with us. We are called to be as steadfast and true in our day as they were in their days. When it entails suffering, God has linked on joy with it. You never have suffering for the Lord by itself. Joy in the Holy Ghost accompanies it.

Verse 9.—"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had." The results of their

visit to Thessalonica was manifest: the ungodly talked about it: even the magistrates and civil rulers were moved by it. There was this in Paul's preaching, that is often left out now-a-days—Jesus as the King.

In the Acts, we read of Paul "preaching the kingdom of God." The privilege side of Scripture is more preached than this in our day. Paul told of a King, a Lord, a Proprietor, a Master. God grant we may ever realize we have been put in "the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ," to be broken in, to be made kind, lowly, humble, good, everything that is God-like. Every bit of insubordination, self-will, haughty spirit, must be broken down by the Master. He is not hard and severe, He does it by washing our feet, and He does it effectually. "Full of goodness, able to admonish one another." Different to what we are by nature. Our Lord is training us, and He will do it in such a way as to make us weep to think we should ever grieve One who loves us so well. His sway is gentle but real. Like a refined mistress who speaks gently to her servant, but expects to be obeyed, so the Lord Jesus expects prompt and thorough obedience from those who are His own by redemption.

"Ye turned to God from idols." An idol is nothing, a sound and nothing more. We have to do with a *real* God, a Christ and Master who expects our thoughts, minds, hearts, and wills to be won over to Him, to be advancing in the knowledge of Him in every way. "To

serve *a* living God," a real God. It is not the common word for *living*. It means One who is *really* God; we have to do with *Him* now. We have been delivered from the life of the flesh, that we may live the life of faith and obedience. We must have it in our minds every day, and not only at conversion, lest we prove to be like those who, having no root, only endure for a while. If I have been really converted, I shall have to do with God more and more every day. Every part of my being will be more taken possession of for God. Clinging to Him by faith, like ivy round the tree. You were converted for a distinct object. To have to do with a "living God," to bring Him into everything, to serve Him. That is where thousands make shipwreck. They rest upon past experience, instead of having to do with a living God. Oh just to know His eye is right down upon our hearts, our spirits, our motives, our actions, every moment. [We must not think we are wholly broken in yet, it is a life-long lesson.]

Verse 10.—"To wait for His Son from heaven." The coming of the Lord is spoken of five times in this Epistle. This is the first. The Person who is coming is the Person who has saved us from the "wrath to come." "Who delivered us from the wrath to come." It is spoken of as past, and a present thing to enjoy. "Wrath to come." Whenever it does come it will be no trifle, for whatever God does, He does it thoroughly, so that anyone can see it is the work of God. But "Jesus

has delivered *us*." He gave Himself. "Raised from the dead" implies He died. The older I get, the more do I feel what I owe to Jesus my Lord, and to God who gave Him up for me. I want my whole being to be swayed by it. The thing is sweet, the order is beautiful. Jesus, first known as Deliverer; then as the Coming One, the same Person. There is nothing to be afraid of. "No condemnation."

When He comes, we shall see our Deliverer, our Redeemer. The saved one rejoicing with others that he has been instrumental in saving. All gathered home together. Christ's work first, not yours, then—"are not even *ye?*" (chap. ii. 19). When we believe, rivers of living water are to flow out. Others are to be won for Christ. "Serving, and waiting." What a blessed position! What is the relation of the two? The one looks at the life, the other at the heart. What is your life? Are you serving God? The moment you are saved, God will accept your service as one of His children. "Whose I am, and whom I serve." (Acts xxvii. 23.) Serve Him, how? The Divine idea is, to obey His Word, with all the heart. "Serve a living and real God." "And to wait." The one is like the oil inside, the other like the light outside. What is my strength for having my will crucified? for being a separated man? "I am waiting for my Lord." The Being that hung upon the Cross, who is sitting upon the right hand of God, who made all things. He is coming again. "His Son."

These words do not occur in the Epistles, so oft as you might think. Wherever they do, there is great emphasis on them. I have to do with a living God, and the Person who is coming for me, will tell me all He has done for me, and that person is "*His Son.*" I shall not regret then, any suffering that obedience to His Word may have caused. Let us pass through this world as pilgrims and strangers waiting for "His Son." Are you waiting for Him? Longing for His return? This will enable you to bear up under the trials of life, and all the opposition which you must expect as you pass along through an enemy's country.

What a beautiful chapter! How full of encouragement and cheer to our hearts! The very remembrance of these great realities should nerve us to live for God, and serve Him here. Our whole life one continued act of obedience to the One who has redeemed us. Turned to God, to serve Him, to know Him every day as a living and real God, keeping, guiding, upholding us. Waiting for His Son: the One who loved us in the past and died for us on the Cross, our Deliverer. Who loves us still in the glory with an unchanging love, and who is our Master and Lord. Who will love us for ever, and for whom we wait. O how soon we shall see Him as He is, and gaze upon His beauty! Surely the thought ought to make us watchful, and keep us on the tip-toe of expectation as we wait for His coming.

Chapter II.

THE "Gospel of God" occurs three times in this chapter, see verses 2, 8, 9. "God's own Gospel," or as in Timothy, "The Gospel of the glory of the happy God." (1 Tim. i. 11). God is so happy at being able to send out His message of love far and wide.

Verse 2.—"Gospel of God." It shows that the origin and the source of all our blessings is from that good One whom we once hated, and thought so little of. Not merely Christ brought us to God, but God would have it so. God Himself, the source of our salvation, to whom we owe everything, who loves us so, as only God can, and now He has got us. He has only got His purpose attained upon which He had set His heart from all eternity. It is so nice to think that God is not looking on me listlessly or grudgingly, or that He was persuaded to have mercy on me because of Christ's importunity. No! but that the blessed God wanted me for Himself.

Three times also, in this chapter, there is a solemn appeal to God.

1. In *verse* 4: "God who trieth our hearts," realising God knows all about us. "Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just." It makes one feel what a real, and true God He is.

2. In *verse* 5.—"God is witness." It is a solemn thing, a blessed thing, when we can feel the searching eye of God while we serve Him. We are all called to serve Him. "God is witness." Dare you in the presence of the Searcher of hearts say in every detail of your life, "God is witness?" I could not say this of all my life, as the Apostle did. There have been failures many. God knows when any work is commenced and carried on to serve Him, or for self-praise.

3. In *verse* 10.—"God is witness also, how holily and justly." It seems as if he anticipated the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us remember we have to stand before that judgment-seat. The Lord will uncover every spring of our actions. The great secret is to anticipate the judgment-seat by keeping a good conscience. When we fail, to confess it to God, and be done with it. Keep short accounts with God. Thus you will be like what an established Christian ought to be, knowing that he pleases God. What is the difference between "holily, justly and unblamably?" "Holily" as respects God. "Justly" as respects himself, his conscience not blaming him. "Unblamably" as respects other people. Oh! what a life a Christian is called to live! Oh! to be holy, just, and unblamable as God calls us to be.

Verse 11.—"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged you." Such was the character of the Apostle's ministry. It is to be our pattern still. Let us heed the advice and example of those who have

trodden the path before us, (Heb. xiii. 7), rather than be influenced by mere professors.

Verse 12.—"That ye would walk worthy." What a standard! "Called to His kingdom and glory." What a wonderful expression! That is our proper place. "Called saints." (Rom. i. 7.) The call makes us so. "His glory!" Oh! what a home ours is, so different to anything the world has ever seen. "The glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them," (John xvii. 22). In Rom. iii. 21, we read, "All have sinned and come short of the glory." A sinner cannot stand that glory. Once Peter, as he felt he was in the presence of God, said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And Isaiah said, "Woe unto me, for I am a man of unclean lips." Either that glory is our home, or hell. Not merely to glory, but to "*His* glory." Where His Word, and way, and smile are everything. Brought out of the kingdom of darkness "into His marvellous light." Now "the God of all grace who hath called you to His own eternal glory." (1 Pet. v. 10.) "God hath, from the beginning, chosen you to *salvation.*" "He called you through our Gospel to the obtaining of the glory." (2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.) It is enough to make us give up everything in this world. He calls you to His glory, then let this world go.

Verse 13.—"For this cause thank we God without ceasing." It is possible not to receive the Word as the Word of *God*, to listen to it like a lovely song, or as the

word of men. Whether it be promise or precept, may it come always to us as a mandate from Heaven.

"Which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

The Word of God has not done its work until it has fashioned us like Christ. We don't tremble at the Word, we don't obey it, we don't know it as we should. Oh to let that Word search, cleanse, separate and fashion us as God would have it. This would be letting it "work effectually."

Verse 14.—"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God," etc. Strictly speaking, there is only one church, the body of Christ, composed of all true believers of this age. But while we are here upon earth the Lord would have us gather in His Name, as He has commanded, to worship Him. There is only one pattern for such churches. Alas! how it has been neglected. Still there will be such "churches" till Christ comes.

Verse 15.—"Who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets," etc. A list of the Jews' sins. Which was the worst?

Verse 16.—"Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles." That "filling up sins," is to hinder others from coming to hear the Word. It is a great thing to feel we are servants of God. And we have to give an account to God. Plenty that has passed current with men will be seen in the true light to be varnished sin. "Fill up." When the patience of God is exhausted, and judgment comes, God will turn the cup upside down, and that is wrath.

Oh! when God speaks! but He is so patient, they think He will never speak, but He will. What a mercy that Jesus drank the cup of wrath for "all that come unto God by Him."

Verse 17.—"Being taken from you for a short time," etc. How He seems to have loved these Thessalonian converts. It is the mark of a pastoral spirit to love the saints.

Verse 18.—"Wherefore we would have come unto you, but Satan hindered us." It is remarkable how he refers to Satan *twice;* here and in chap. iii. 5. Hindering and tempting, that is his work. The work of the devil is a real work. The devil is busy still, and tries to hinder God's work. If it is God's work the devil will try and do it mischief if he can.

Verse 19.—"For what is our hope," etc. Here is the heart of a true pastor. Five things He says about these converts: Hope, crown, joy, glory, rejoicing. He did not let them run any way they pleased. "Who is that faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord shall set over His household to give them their portion of food?" (Luke xii. 42.) It is not the way of the Lord, that saints should be without shepherding. "At His coming." Then the pastoral work will be finished. It is very blessed to have care for redeemed souls, saved souls. How blessed when the Lord can take Paul, or those who have cared for believing souls, and give them a crown. It is possible that these principles should be ignored, forgetting that

the Good Shepherd has given under-shepherds to feed and take care of the flock (Heb. xiii. 7). There are some that cause sorrow, but don't throw up the work because of that.

"At His coming." Coming means "presence." Going up before Him to give account. This is the second aspect of "the coming of the Lord." If you do not care for the growth in grace of the children of God, nor for the salvation of the unsaved, it is very probable you are not saved yourself. "In that day he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together."

"Before our Lord Jesus Christ at His presence." He is present to faith now, but will be bodily present with His saints some day. There is something intensely solemn as well as intensely joyous here. Solemn for those who have sought to feed and serve themselves, instead of Him. There is one thing that all saints can do, and that is to pray. Pray one for another, (Jas. v. 16): pray for the servants of Christ preaching the Word, (Heb. xiii. 18): pray for all saints, (Eph. vi. 18).

The coming of the Lord is presented in this chapter in connection with the home-bringing of the children of God, the glory and the crown. Faithful service may pass unnoticed here, but not in heaven. Oh, the joy of having from the Master's lips, "Well done:" of receiving from His hand a crown, and of seeing there gathered those for whom toil and tears and prayers have been spent in earthly days, all safely home at last!

Chapter III.

THIS chapter again brings before us the coming or "presence" of the Lord, but here in yet another light. It views the time when He will have all His saints around Him. What a wonderful thing that is.

This chapter is about believers loving one another, being drawn in heart to one another. Quite a change of thought from chap. ii. There, the under-shepherds care for the flock, here, *all* the flock are to love and care for one another.

Verses 1, 2.—The apostle had been quickly moved from Thessalonica. The saints there had only a short time of his ministry and shepherd-care. They were left in the midst of persecution and "much affliction," so that the apostle yearned to hear of them. It is the true mark of a shepherd to have a burdened heart, the care of the sheep pressing continually upon it, especially when they are in danger, and passing through times of trouble. What a beautiful character is given to Timothy in verse 2. "Brother, servant of God, and fellow-labourer." He began well, (Acts xvi. 1-3), not running too fast, but serving with the apostle, as a son with a father, (Phil. ii. 20-22). Now he can be entrusted with the work of

"establishing" and "comforting" these persecuted and tempted saints. What an honour to be helpers of such.

Verse 3.—"That no man should be moved by these afflictions." Acts xvii. shows, what the afflictions were. But God is above the devil, and the effect was, instead of *scattering* them, the afflictions only drew them closer together, and made them love one another more. I think it would have the same effect now. Christians are so divided, but if persecution arose, the chaff would drop off, and the true saints would get together. The difficulty in these days is to know true Christians, for in those early days, if a man named the Name of Christ, he suffered persecution and affliction,

"We are appointed thereunto."

Verse 4.—The apostle told them what awaited them. He did not give them all the bright side and keep back the dark. The Lord Himself gave both. (See John xiv. 1-3: xvi. 33). We have not so much of this now. Empty profession is the snare in our day.

There is an awful word in 2 Tim. iii. 4—"heady." Some persons can talk fluently of their conversion, give the exact date, and yet are not changed in their lives, while a few others cannot tell you exactly the date when they were converted, and yet their lives show you they have been. So these are "perilous, difficult times," so many having the "*form* of godliness," and we are told to turn away from such. Truly we need heavenly wisdom,

to know how we are to act. Sometimes the devil appears as in 1 Thess. iii., and sometimes as in 2 Tim. iii. Let us watch.

Verses 6-10.—"Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and love." There is nothing said about their *hope:* that had been somewhat disturbed. In chap. i. 3, faith, hope, and love all appear. Here faith and love alone. The first thing the enemy assails is "the hope." He seeks by one means or another, to obscure and deprive the saints of their proper hope, the personal coming of the Lord Jesus, to take us to be with Himself. Oh how the devil hates that, for well he knows the power of it on the lives of God's saints. "Let us hold fast the profession of our hope without wavering," (Heb. x. 23.)

How the apostle loved these Thessalonian saints! He and his fellow-labourers had their very lives bound up in their steadfastness, their joy and comfort was in their welfare, they were in their thoughts by day and by night.

True Christians are to be drawn together, to love more. How? Think how Christ loves that one, that there is Christ in him, that you have to spend eternity with him. It is possible to love a man, and yet not to like his ways. There are some Christians who have so much of the flesh and the old nature in them, they are so selfish and bad tempered, that we should not like to live twenty years under the same roof with them. But when they

and we are changed, how nice to spend eternity together. Look at that striking passage in Mal. i. 2, "I have loved you," saith the Lord, but their ways were so naughty that Jehovah had to add in verse 10: "I have no pleasure in you." So in one another we see things we do not like, but we are to love what is of Christ. "A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." He sacrificed Himself in love to us, and we are to sacrifice ourselves and our personal interests, in love to others.

Verse 13.—"I sent to know your faith, lest by some means, the tempter had tempted you," etc. As sure as the Word is preached, the devil is busy. We little realize Satan's wiles to what we should.

Verse 13.—"To the end He may establish you." Love leads to holiness; we must not separate the two. I am to love where I see the divine life, and a trembling at God's Word, and so to have my heart established "in holiness before God, even our Father." Our Father loves all His children, let us love them all, too. Our Father may not approve of all their ways, neither are we to. No one will be ashamed in that day of having loved the people of God. Oh! what a grand moment when the *Lord* gathers all His saints together around Himself.

We should make mistakes as to who are His saints, but the Lord won't. "He knoweth them that are His." He will have them, no more, no less. When He comes,

will He take *you?* You ought not to have a doubt about it. "To the end he may *establish* you."

"Christ the Lord will come again,
None shall wait for Him in vain.
I shall then His glory see.
Christ will come and call for me."

Chapter IV.

IN this chapter, the eye is fixed on the Lord "*Himself.*" It is remarkable how the little affairs of everyday life are placed in the light of the "coming of the Lord." There are two great matters here spoken of. The first is our personal purity, verse 8. Christians should not be guilty of impurity, because the Holy Ghost dwells in them. What a remarkable reason! So in 1 Cor. vi. 18-20, the same reason is assigned. The very highest motives are given to guide us in our daily walk. God would have us ever remember that we are His children, and that in everyday matters there is nothing trifling.

The second; brotherly love, verse 9. How often the Holy Ghost enjoins us to this, for well He knew how quickly it would ebb even among God's children, save as they abide in His love.

Then the chapter closes as the others do, with "The coming of the Lord." Verse 13, "Them that are asleep." In verse 16 called "dead." Scripture does sometimes speak of Christians as being "the *dead* in Christ," so we need not be afraid to use the word. It does not mean that their spirits, but their bodies. When believers die, their spirits are not unconscious, they consciously enjoy His presence. "In Thy presence there is fulness of joy."

"To depart and be with Christ which is *very* far better!" (Phil. i. 23.) "That ye sorrow not as those which have no hope." What a solemn thing for the lost! "No hope," a vain, empty, groundless hope, but *we have* a hope, and we know we shall be with those who have died in Christ. Here the eye is directed to *Himself.* "Himself" is the big word of this chapter. "Would not have you ignorant." They had not the full revelation that we have. They needed further revelation regarding the sleeping saints. They feared they might miss them.

Verse 14.—"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again." What a *simple* thing salvation is! He died and rose again according to the Scriptures. These are fundamental matters. So the Holy Ghost has been pleased to show us where all rests. "Even so them also which sleep *through* Jesus." If not for Jesus, instead of being "asleep" they would have been in torment. When the Lord comes, God will bring His saints "with Him." He will bring them bodily, when Jesus comes in His resurrection body.

Verse 15.—"For this we say unto you by the Word of of the Lord." That is a striking expression. It had been specially revealed to the Apostle, as in 1 Cor. xv. 34. "Behold! I show you a mystery." "The living shall not precede them that are fallen asleep." That is a comfort to the saints dying. When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will begin with those whose bodies are in the tomb.

Verse 16.—"For the Lord *Himself*," etc. The Spirit of

God calls attention to the fact that He Himself will come. Our eye is fixed on one object "*Himself.*" Oh! what a wonderful thing to see *Him.* "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." He has too much respect for His Church to *send* for her; He will come Himself. Though so many have departed to be "with Him," still the Church is regarded as here. We are as much loved and as much responsible, as when the Lord rose, or went to heaven. People think a little laxity may be allowed. No, not a bit of it, and when the Lord comes, He will come for His Church. "He will descend," that shows it will be a bodily, real descent.

"The Lord Himself," the Master, the Divine One, the human One, Himself! Reading this so often, perhaps we do not realize the force of it. It is the One that is to fill heaven and earth.

"With a shout," the word denotes a signal, which He will give to His own. Like as the soldier knows the signal of the general, or the sailor of the captain, so the Lord's people will understand the signal, and no one else. He will come secretly. We read in Acts viii. 39, "The Spirit of the Lord *caught* away Philip." It is the same word from which our word "rapture" comes. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead," etc. The Holy Ghost will do it. What a wonderful hope is ours! Thank God we have such a prospect, such a hope! How can it be secret if it is a "shout." Did anybody track the way the Spirit took Philip? No one: "he was

found at Azotus," so the Spirit is here to form and maintain the Church of God, and when the Lord comes, the Spirit will take away the Church. When Paul was converted, those with him heard a voice, but saw no man. In another place it says, "they heard not the voice of him that spake." (Acts ix., xxii. 10.) It denotes they heard something, but could not unravel it. The Church will know. "It is the voice of my Beloved," at last. It also denotes triumph and joy. Oh! when He comes, when we hear His voice, it will be a sound in our ears, enough to make us leap for joy. These verses are specially our portion, on which our souls should feed.

"The voice of the Archangel and the trump of God." The same as the "shout." The Lord Jesus is the only Archangel we read of in the Scriptures. It may denote a voice, that which thrills the earth, and electrifies heaven. The world may hear a sound. Christ in the Government of the world is the Archangel. What that voice will be, we know not, but we ought to be every moment on the tiptoe of expectation, and never be doing a thing which if He came we should be ashamed of. "The dead in Christ rise first"; that is as to their bodies; their spirits will come down with Him, and both will be joined together. Oh! what a worker Christ is. Then the living saints will be changed as to their bodies. (1 Cor. xv. 52.) Then all together caught up. Oh! what a moment.

Verse 17.—"Together with them," *i.e.*, simultaneously; won't it be a grand moment?

"We that are alive, that are left." The Lord always has had a people waiting for Him. For eighteen centuries the church has been waiting for that coming.

"In clouds." It may refer to shoals of saints from all parts, rising up in all directions, but the great point is what we are caught up for. "To meet the Lord." We have often got away from Him here, we shall not get away from Him any more. "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Oh! the blessed joy of meeting, all the desert past."

This is your hope? Which would you rather have? This Hope, or a million pounds? This Hope or to be a nobleman? Oh! if you have only this world it will soon fade and pass away. Oh! to have this Hope! To be with the *Lord*. With the uncreated One, who made all things *Himself*. Surely it is a moment we must rejoice in. Like as the bride and the bridegroom are glad when their union takes place, so shall the joy of Christ be "exceeding joy," (Jude 23), and our joy shall be "full." Is it not wonderful so few Christians care for it? Is it not strange that our own hearts are not listening for that signal every moment?

Verse 18. "Wherefore comfort one another with *these* words." Is it done? I may be bold to say, a great many real Christians never think of comforting one another with *these* words. They are looking for death, and for the world's conversion rather than "The Coming of the Lord."

Chapter V.

VERSE 1.—"But of the times and seasons." The coming of the Lord is a blessed truth. It is for the family of God. "The day of the Lord" is an awful thought. It refers to the time when He comes in judgment to the world. The time we do not know, but He *will* come for He has promised. He will not disappoint us. His promise is, "I am coming again to receive you, to Myself." (John xiv. 3.) Oh, what a hope! The reason He does not tell us the time is, to keep us on the tip-toe of expectation every day.

Verse 2.—"For yourselves know perfectly, the Day of the Lord will come as a thief." The meaning is, the Lord will come unexpectedly, while the world says, as in 2 Peter iii. "Where is the promise of His coming?" It will take them with awful surprise. They are seen trembling in Rev. vi. 17.

Verses 4, 5.—We are called "sons of light." Because as "sons of light," we rise when the sun rises. When Jesus comes, we come, like as when the sun comes, the rays come with him. It implies we come with Him, and must have gone away first. All come together. Instead of counting days and looking for signs, our part is to be watching for the signal, with our ears on the alert for the

sound. "Be sober." Let our judgments be unbiased by the things of the world. If we reason as men of the world, we become spiritually intoxicated. If we are not believers in the coming of the Lord, waiting for Him we are not "sober."

Verse 8.—"Putting on the breastplate of *faith* and *love*, and for a helmet the *hope*." These three, are continually put together. At the beginning of this Epistle we read of them, (chap. i. 3.) There to work with, here to fight with. In Eph. vi. 11, believers are to take the whole armour. The high priest of old had a breastplate with the names of the tribes of Israel engraven. The Lord Jesus, our Great High Priest, has a breastplate with the names of all His saints on His breast. He bears our names on His heart: how blessed! His breastplate tells of His love to us. God sees our names, and His love to us. Here we are to put on the "breastplate of faith and love." The world is to see our faith in Him, our love to Him, and to prove that we represent Him here. He owns us *there*, confesses us there: we are to own and confess Him down *here*. "I believe in Jesus," is right enough for the tongue to say, but it is better for the life to say it, that others may see we believe in and love Him. There are correlative duties on our part, corresponding with His actions up there. These are little known. To own them will bring us into trouble, especially if we contend for those truths which tend to separate us from the world.

"For a helmet the hope of salvation." There is nothing of doubt here, but the hope that He will come and save us. I hope He will come back very soon. You are to hope it whether He comes or not. "The Hope" is His return, when He will save the body as well as the soul. We look for Him to come a second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb. ix. 28.) It is assumed we have only one Hope. One promise shines out more brightly than the others, it is, "I am coming again." It is "*The* Hope," (Rom. viii. 24), and "*The* Promise," (Heb. x. 36, 37.)

Verses 9, 10.—"For God hath not appointed us to wrath," etc. These verses are very sweet. People will spend hundreds of pounds on pictures and then tire of them. Here is a beautiful picture we cannot tire of. "God hath not appointed us to wrath." He had us in His heart from all eternity, "Not for wrath." He has been carrying that out, "Not for wrath." "But to obtain salvation;" alluding to the words before, the "Hope of salvation," that final, full salvation, which shall be ours at His coming.

Verse 10.—"Whether we *watch* or sleep." In the Greek, there are two different words for sleep. 1. Moral sleep: 2. Sleep of the body. Now here it means moral sleep as verse 7. Chap. iv. 15, is the sleep of the body. It is the same word from which the word "cemetery" comes. In Matt. xxv. 5, "Whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and *slept*." There it is *moral*

sleep, not watching for Him. Christ died for us, that whether watchful or unwatchful we shall be taken home. It shows us, that even if we are not as we ought to be, on the tip-toe of expectation, if we are more or less living negligently and carelessly, still He won't leave one of His saints behind. It is very comforting, precious and gracious, for the most godly dare not say, he is always watching, and always doing those things which please God. Of course, though all are taken away, there will be a solemn difference made as regards reward. (2 John 8.) Some will be ashamed before Him at His coming, (1 John ii. 28), but not one true saint watching, or sleeping, shall be left. "Who died for us." It all depends on His death; He died to get us, He cannot lose or leave one, not the feeblest of His own.

Verse 11.—"Wherefore comfort yourselves together." What a pity to talk about all the wretched things which divide Christians, instead of "Jesus died for us," and is coming for us, and we are to live with Him; and so we should "build up one another." We need these things to buoy us up in the world. Satan is prone to fill our minds either with the frivolities of the world, or the feuds and strifes of the children of God. God grant we may heed this exhortation.

Verses 12, 13.—Here we have pastoral work. "Be at peace," showing there may be occasions for strife. It shows there was imperfection even in those days. Need we wonder if there are in ours?

Verse 14.—"Warn the unruly," etc. Yet what a mercy, all are dear to God, all in Christ. *All* needed patience. Some needed to be warned, some to be comforted, some strengthened, but *all* needed patience. Do not we?

Verse 16.—"Rejoice evermore." And yet it is true, as Peter says, "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."

Verse 17.—"Pray without ceasing." To turn everything to something to talk to God about. It is utterly opposed to self-will, to refer everything to God, little and big. It is good of God to encourage us to this sort of life.

Verse 18.—"In everything give thanks, etc. Talk to Him before it comes, as it comes, and then "in everything give thanks." It is easy to thank God when all goes smoothly, but God would encourage us to a thankful spirit at all times. "For this is the will of God" that overseeing One who is ever watching us while we pass the time of our sojourning here.

Verse 19.—"Quench not the Spirit." That is, in others chiefly, while gathered for worship, or to minister. It is possible to quench the Spirit's ministry, and hinder it, either by human arrangement, or lawlessness. In ourselves we may "grieve the Spirit." (Eph. v. 30.)

Verse 20.—"Despise not prophesyings." Many profess to show God's will nowadays; we must not rashly reject or receive. There are no revelations or prophesyings now

outside God's written Word. The teacher opens up the Word. The two hang together. "Despise not prophesyings"—"Prove all things." When you have proved all things, retain the wheat and throw away the chaff. "*Hold fast* that which is *good*."

Verse 22.—"Abstain from all appearance of evil." That is a very peremptory command about evil. The world's motto is, "Of two evils choose the less;" that is not God's. If there is sin in anything, have nothing to do with it, whether it is in one's own individual walk, socially, or ecclesiastically. "Abstain from the very semblance of evil." Do not try how close to it you can walk and remain undefiled. Flee from it altogether.

Verse 23.—"And the very God of peace." What a beautiful name. He wants every atom of us, without any reserve whatever. Our whole "spirit, and soul, and body." He hasn't got us all for Himself yet. It's a life-long struggle, for there is the flesh in us, and the flesh will never be subdued to the Holy Ghost, so the Holy Ghost never speaks of sanctifying the flesh, but "the body." Only as we come to know the love and grace and affection of God better, do we give in to Him. He means us well we know at the bottom, but sometimes we distrust and oppose Him. It shows that, in one sense, sanctification is progressive, though in another it is finished. Here it is the surrender of the will, everything yielded up to the Spirit which dwells within. Remember the double aspect of the truth. Like as we are saved

and are being saved. It is the keeping of the two sides together, which does us good. "The very God of peace sanctify you:" showing the way to enjoy His presence is to keep His Word.

Verse 24.—"Faithful is He that calleth you." We have been called, He is calling us, and He will call us by and bye, when we hear His signal. The call is going on from the moment the voice of Jesus gladdened our hearts, till His call will gladden our ears, and we shall be with Him for ever. He will, for He is a faithful God, blessed be His Name.

Verse 25.—"Brethren pray for us." How wonderful that the apostle needed the prayers of saints. He greatly valued them. We should pray for one another.

Verse 26.—"Greet all the brethren." The reverse of a cold shake of the hand. Oh! the warmth of the gush of affection; the warm, loving spirit between one another. How different to the jarring discords of the present day. "*All* the brethren," not only the loveable and amiable. If they be God's children they are our brethren. Let us love them, though we may not love or imitate all their ways.

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS.

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.

Chapter I.

VERSE 1.—"Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Has God any particular lesson to teach us from that expression? Instead of saying, "The Church in Thessalonica." He says, "Church of the Thessalonians." It looks almost as if they were about just to be taken from the world altogether. There is only one other place like it, and that has a very different meaning. In Col. iv. 16. "The Church of the Laodiceans." Laodicea means, "Rights of the people." Thessalonians, "Those who win the victory." One looks at things so very earthly, the other at things heavenly. Victory over the world.

Verse 2.—"Grace unto you and peace." God is never tired of pressing these words home upon us.

"Grace, 'tis a charming sound." It all turns upon grace that we are saved at all. The first action of grace is to give us peace. We have grace and peace; but these

words assume, you may go on and on knowing the work of grace and the enjoyment of peace. You have not as much of either as you might have. "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." (Heb. xiii. 9.) That is the food of the new nature. God deals with us in grace just as He pleases, "Even so Father." As we get older, we learn more and more of our unworthiness. Don't you know more of it than you did a year ago? Have you not had discoveries which made you shudder? What a blessed thing that God is dealing with us in grace. We cannot mix anything with grace. There are not two Epistles alike, each is entirely different in its purport, but all have this expression in them, "Grace and peace." Wherever we are, or whatever we may be called to, we need both.

Verse 3.—"We are bound to thank God." There was much to be truly thankful for. Faith growing, love abounding, but not a word as to hope. Notice the solemn omission. This second Epistle was only written a year after the first, and yet in so short a time, they had begun to decline. He cannot mention about their Hope. They were not now so intensely longing for the coming of the Lord. The Bridegroom tarries, and many Christians begin to relax about the Hope. When a man begins to decline before God, the coming of the Lord is not so intensely precious as it used to be. The moment we begin to be worldly, we cry with less fervour, "Come, Lord Jesus." God grant we may

never cease to be on the tip toe of expectation for His return. There are things, however, which He does praise, "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and your love to each other aboundeth." If we are really growing in the divine life, we do come to love one another more. I mean what we see of Christ in one another. "Faith in God." What a God He must be to want us to have such strong faith in Him. Does our faith grow? We should trust Him implicitly, He will never disappoint us.

Verse 4.—They had to rough it. It was no "bed of roses," the Christian's path then; would you like to taste the bitter waters again? We may for aught we know.

Verse 5.—"Which is a manifest token." Suffering and and the kingdom are always put together. If we suffer, we shall reign. God's gift is eternal life, to be co-heirs with His Beloved Son, but then there is a kingdom besides, and according as we have acquitted ourselves in His service, there will be a corresponding reward hereafter. Now is the time to suffer for Christ; then to be rewarded. He will enter into the fullest detail, we shall see He took notice of every little heart-throb as it throbbed for Him. How it ought to make us valiant soldiers for Christ to know it.

Verses 6.—It is a righteous thing with God to give us rest some day. As a general rule, His people are a poor, afflicted and persecuted people, and often the enemies of the Lord seem to have it all their own way, but He will show out His power and rule by and by.

This is the time of His wonderful patience with the world. It would not be righteous with God to let things go on always as they are. Those who are clinging to Him, He must sometime reward, and those who are not for Him, He must as a righteous God punish. This ought to encourage us. If we are real Christians, we must know something of suffering for Christ here, but we may be assured that God will interfere some day.

Verse 7.—"Rest with us." That is "cessation." The last tear will have trickled from your eye, the last sigh escaped from your heart—"cessation." Don't you have grief at the sin around and within you? "Cessation" will come. When the Lord interferes, His people shall have had the last bit of trouble. It means suffering here for Christ. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own, but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," (John xv. 19.) Some of these days He will say "Stop" to the world's wickedness. The "Day of the Lord" is a far vaster thing than the "Coming of the Lord." It will be a time of terror and judgment to the ungodly. This is the subject of 2 Thess. i. What a wonderful thing, that that Being who hung upon the Cross in agony, the next time the world sees Him will be with His "mighty angels" to take vengeance. See who will suffer: Two classes. Those "who know not God," infidels, pagans, (verse 8), and Christ rejectors. Oh make sure you are not one of them that "obey not the gospel."

Verse 10.—"When He shall come to be glorified in His saints." When all *His* beauty will be seen in His saints with Him. Where does the moon get her light and beauty from? The sun. Now we are so feeble and breaking down. Oh, what a difference when He comes and we see Him. He turns the charcoal into diamonds. Oh, what a precious Saviour He is! The woman is the glory of man; the church will be the glory of Christ. "Being glorified in His saints," and "being admired in them that believe." What is the difference? The former expression refers to the Old Testament saints, and the other to New Testament believers. Did not the Old Testament saints believe? Yes, but their faith partook more of the nature of hope. They believed a Saviour would come and save them; we believe in a Saviour who has come and saved us, and we look for Him to come a second time to save our bodies. Ah, we are still unbelievers sometimes. Does not the faith of Abraham or of Moses put us to shame when they so dared for God, and we so wince when a cross is put in our path?

The parenthesis ("because our testimony was believed") shows who are meant by believers. "In that day," refers to the day when He shall come: the day when Christ shall be admired! What a new thing it will be! To be admired by millions of adoring ones, not by a simple few as now. Oh, what a grand and blissful moment that will be! Oh, when Jesus comes and multitudes gather around Him! How it will gladden

our hearts when we see the One that died for us and clung to us, admired and glorified as He ought to be! When we think what poor things believers are, how wonderful when He glorifies them and shows what He can make of them. Thus He will be glorified in His saints, and glory will stream out from Him. Oh, what a precious Saviour He will be seen to be. What a wonderful thing that a Saviour like that should have hung on the Cross for you and for me. Of the ancient temple we read, "In His temple doth every one speak of His glory," (Psalm xxix. 5), or as it might be rendered, "Every whit in His temple says 'Glory.'" In the coming day of His glory, the whole of His heavenly temple will be flooded with glory, all of it shouting forth His praise. "Because our testimony was believed." Think of the day when you believed, when the Lord revealed His love to you. Then look at the other end. "That day." Think of the Spirit of God uniting the two ends. We believe the "testimony" and receive it in our hearts. Thus we are to be for the glory of the Lord Jesus. The woman is the glory of man. Christ displays God's glory, and we display His glory. When Christ has His Church up there, He will be glorified in her. The Apostle often speaks of "that day," as if it were such a day he couldn't forget it. The practical close to all this is in—

Verse 11.—"Wherefore we pray always for you." The Apostle yearned to see them living and walking worthy

of their calling, so he was on his knees for them. How much need the saints still have of such prayer. "Fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness." That implies you may trust Him. He may cause you to have sighs and tears, but He is only polishing you. He has an end in view. He won't hurt you, even if He cause you to suffer pain, it is to do you good in the long run.

Verse 12.—"That the Name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and ye in Him." What a climax! Christ glorified in His saints; the saints glorified in Him. This will be the grand result of all His work for and in us.

Chapter II.

THE Thessalonians were in sore persecution and they thought they were in the beginning of the "Day of the Lord." They were evidently being assailed by the enemy, and made to believe that the day of the Lord was "present" (Greek) not "at hand." They are corrected as to this in two ways: (1), for their hearts; (2), for their minds.

1. For their hearts. *Verse* 1. When the Lord comes, the first thing will be the gathering of the saints to Himself. The Day of the Lord cannot come, that is the full blaze of that day, until the apostasy has set in. The apostasy cannot come until the Hinderer goes, and that is the Holy Ghost, see verses 6, 7. When He goes, He will not go alone. He will take the Church with Him. Christ coming for His Church is as the Morning Star, (Rev. xxii. 18). He will have His saints: His blood has bought them. His coming to the earth will be as the rising sun, (Mal. iv. 3), public and manifest. Everybody will see Him, (Rev. i. 7). He will not let wickedness get to a head till the Church has gone. Then the apostasy will set in.

"Gathering together." This word only occurs twice in all Scripture. Here and in Heb. x. 25. Not forsaking the

assembling of yourselves," etc. It is the same Greek word. The Holy Ghost uses it once about the saints clustering round Him up there and down here.

Verse 2.—"As that the day of Christ has set in," or is present, same word in Rom. viii. 38,—"Things present." "Things *present*." (1 Cor. iii. 22.) All the same word.

Verse 3.—Don't listen to men. They will soon deceive and mislead you. The Day of the Lord is not come. You may be going through tribulation, we are appointed to it; but not through "the great tribulation." That cannot be while the Church is here.

Verse 4.—"Who opposeth." What awful times are coming for the world when the Church has gone. As things rapidly ripened when Christ was rejected before, so the world will ripen in guilt when the Holy Ghost is finally rejected, and goes up with the Church. At the end of this age, the world will ripen in iniquity, and Antichrist will sit in the temple as God.

Verse 5.—When Paul was with them he told them of these things. Saints should be taught them still, (1 Tim. iv. 1-6.)

Verses 6, 7.—"Now ye know what withholdeth." In both these verses, the word is "the Hinderer." Until the Hinderer, the Holy Ghost is "out of the midst."

Verse 8.—"Then shall that lawless one" be revealed. Thus as there is a mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," (1 Tim. iii. 16), so is there a "mystery of iniquity," one very opposed to the other. "Be revealed;"

the same word as is used of the Lord. (2 Thess. i. 7.) It shows how the devil will mimic Christ.

Verse 9.—"Even him, whose coming." The same word again. The language is very strong.

Verse 10.—"With all deceivableness," etc., "God shall send them strong delusion," etc. What solemn words, enough to make one tremble if we have any unsaved friends. What a mercy to be saved, to have the Holy Ghost. Seek to get all your kindred with you.

Verse 13.—"But we are bound to give thanks." Every word is full of encouragement. The middle verses are awful, like thick clouds laden with judgment, and these verses are like a bit of blue sky. "Brethren, beloved of the Lord." Not merely "beloved," but "of the Lord." What a precious statement! "God hath from the beginning chosen you." When in Christ, we are not afraid of the doctrine of election. It is very precious to know, that God always intended to save us; a purpose He had before "eternal ages," (2 Tim. i. 9). However far we go back, God intended to do all that these verses declare. "Hath from the beginning." They are the same words which are used of the Eternal Life in 1 John i. It is very precious to know that we did not first choose God, but He chose us. "Chosen to salvation." It was with a gracious object in view. Salvation in God's account, is completed at the time of "our gathering unto Him." It will be the carrying out of the eternal purpose which He purposed in His Son. The two ends

are brought out in this chapter, the past in verse 13, the future end in verse 1. "From the beginning."

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly forced us in.

If it had not been for Christ, there would have been no feast; if it had not been for the Holy Ghost, there would have been no guests. "Through sanctification of the Spirit," *i.e.*, quickening us, and making us to live. And "belief of the truth." The Apostle had said in verse 12, "that they all might be damned who *believed not* the truth." The truth of God's love, of Christ dying for sinners. "God commendeth His love toward us," etc. (Rom. v. 8.) "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." There is the truth, and we believe it, and we live. Thus we are sanctified or separated unto Him.

Verse 14.—"Whereunto He called you by our Gospel." The truth about us, that we deserved hell; about God, that He loved us and sent His Son; about Christ that He died for us. "To the obtaining of the glory." This was the object of God in choosing, calling and quickening us, to bring us "to glory." God has not done with us here? When will He? In one sense, *never;* in another, when we've got the glory. Mind what glory. The glory of "Our Lord Jesus." That glory He received of the Father. "The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them." (John xvii. 23.)

Verse 15.—"Therefore stand fast." Surely this is enough to make us. "And hold the traditions which ye

have been taught." "Traditions" mean things that the writer had delivered. The things I handed down to you. (1 Cor. xi. 2.) Traditions, ordinances, whatever the Lord said, *do* it. Are we to have the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we now saved, quickened by the Holy Ghost? Do we believe in God's love, grace and mercy to us? Is it true God set that love upon us before the world began? Therefore hold tight to the ordinances. They are so many inducements why we should be zealous and obey God, because He has done so much for us.

Verse 16.—"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father." Twice over in these few verses He tells us of His love. "Who hath loved us." We are not tired of hearing of God's love to us. Who would not like to be loved of God? "And hath given us everlasting consolation." Comfort that shall be abiding, it will stand for ever, no one can rob us of it. "And good hope," that is the coming of the Lord. Some people have "no hope." Some hope that they will get rich and be great men. These are not our hopes. Ours is "a good hope." Oh! what a hope that is! When Jesus comes, up we go. That's our Hope. "The Lord Jesus Christ Himself." That occurs in both Epistles. 1 Thess. iv. 16,—"The Lord *Himself* shall descend." Here, "The Lord *Himself*."

Verse 17.—"Comfort your hearts." They need comfort, for we are in the wilderness, here we have trials;

the words imply it. We have things to distress us, weigh us down, make us sigh. We must have them as long as we are in the wilderness. But though we have trials, He comforts our hearts. It is a great comfort to know that our sins are forgiven, that we have eternal life, that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits, that we are God's children, and that we have a good home to go to. It is "*everlasting* consolation." He does not want us to have it to-day, and take it away to-morrow. The idea of comfort in Hebrew is, "to speak to the *heart*." None but God can do that. "The Lord *Himself*." So in chap. iii. 16, "The Lord of peace *Himself*." That is the blessed way of reading Scripture; when you read a chapter, read it under the eye of God. "And stablish you"—same word as in 1 Thess. iii. 2, 13. Saints then needed to be stablished and strengthened, saints need to be so still. There is too much to draw us away from Christ and the truth. Unless saints are well established and have the Word firm as a rock beneath their feet, the devil will find them an easy prey. Only the truth can preserve us. "Every good word and work" or "work and word" as it should be read. Doctrine and practice are both need: they are closely related too. May the Lord keep us right in both, and with Himself.

Chapter III.

VERSE 1.—"Finally brethren, pray for us." This shows that the Apostle, eminent saint that he was, felt he needed to be prayed for. We should pray for one another; take one another to the Lord.

Verse 2.—"That the Word of the Lord may have free course"—that is "run," and "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men," etc. The Apostle went about preaching and doubtless found unreasonable and wicked men, but what a nice word comes next.

Verse 3.—"The Lord is faithful" if men are not. "Keep you from the Evil One." We do know his machinations, devices and wiles to cast us down, but "the Lord is faithful." There are a good many reminders in God's Word of the faithfulness of the Lord. Our part is to trust Him, His to respond to our trust. How simple! And yet how telling, how encouraging! "The Lord is faithful."

Verse 5.—"And the Lord direct your hearts." "The Lord make your hearts straight." If we play fast and loose with Scripture, no wonder if we don't get all the profit we might, we must seek to walk obediently. In Rom. v. 4, "the love of God is put into our hearts," and here "the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God."

The love of God is vast, and our hearts are so narrow. The believer is placed in the very centre of Christ's love. "That ye may know the breadth and length, and depth and height," (Eph. iii. 18.) To enjoy it, "The Lord direct your hearts into." This is an experimental matter. May we by experience know what it is to have our hearts surrounded on all sides with the love of God. And "into the patience of Christ," the endurance of Christ. The love of God is to be your joy, and then a little suffering for Christ, your blessed portion. A little bit of suffering for Christ, will make you rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer for Him. The love of God is something to lift you up, the patience of Christ something to make you feel what a world you are in. Could God do more than He has done? Take it into your hearts and enjoy it. If Christ trusted God, He was His strength in the day of battle, and should be ours.

Verse 6.—"Now we command you brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw." Here is a positive command. If people would not walk after the things that he had delivered unto them, he commanded them to withdraw from them. These are precepts to be obeyed. Do not let us forget them; let us be simple and obedient, walking in the *will* of God as we enjoy the *love* of God. Observe too it is "from every brother:" it is no question of a man being a Christian, but one walking disorderly—out of rank. Such a person can do more to dishonour the Name of the Lord than

an unbeliever, and should be made to feel it by godly ones keeping aloof from him in his disobedience to the Lord's commandments.

Verse 7.—"Imitate us." We teach by our ways, as well as by our words. Paul could say, "Be ye imitators of me." "What ye have seen me do." (Phil. iv. 12.) If a man's doctrine and his practice do not correspond, he becomes a cause of stumbling. Oh how needful that those who preach and teach and go before God's saints, should be men of holy walk and unimpreachable character!

Verse 8.—"Neither did we eat any men's bread for nought." There were some who did not work. Probably they thought Christ was so near, they need not. That shows us that if Christ were to come to-morrow, it is His holy will we should be at our work the same as usual. There is no wickedness in work; there often is when there is no work. Watts say,

> "Satan finds some mischief still,
> For idle hands to do."

We are to separate from even a brother who walks disorderly.

Verses 10-12.—"If any will not work," *i.e.*, does not wish to work. "Let him not eat." Laziness and idleness are not to be condoned or encouraged. Such persons are always disseminators of evil, busybodies.

Verse 13.—"Be not weary in well doing." Our hearts are to be directed into the love of God, but do not

separate the patience of Christ. His willingness to endure by a life of obedience and suffering. We cannot obey God thoroughly without suffering from our flesh, let alone anything else. See 1 Pet. iv. 1—"Forasmuch then as Christ," etc. Sin never got into Christ. He ever kept it out. The very opposite is yielding to the flesh, and when we obey God and don't give way, we suffer because our flesh is denied. That is one specimen of endurance. We have to live out the new nature He has begotten in us, by a holy life.

Verses 14, 15.—Here we have definite instruction not to keep company with one living in disobedience to the truth, so that he may be ashamed.

How much evil is often done, by sympathizing with one living in disobedience, and thus hindering his restoration. If God tells us to mark one so living and cease to keep company with him, we may rest assured it for his good. Yet he is not to be counted an enemy, but thought of and dealt with as a brother. How all this needs spiritual discernment, a heart filled with Christ's love, and a mind exercised in the Word, so as to have keen perception to act with God, dealing as He does with the offending brother, seeking always his deliverance and restoration.

Verse 16.—"Now the Lord Himself give you peace," etc. How much the Bible speaks about "peace." It is a beautiful word, a heavenly word. "Give it you," as if after all, it must be grace, and His own love to provide it

and see we have it. There is an earnestness about it, "The Lord Himself." As if he takes it in His own hand to see to it, that we are established in it. "Always" when at prayer to enjoy it, when reading the Word to enjoy it, when about our business to enjoy it, so that by our very faces others may be able to say, "There's a man that enjoys peace." "By all means," in all ways. How comprehensive! "At all times, in all ways." How the Lord would have us live, bringing Him into everything, having Himself and His peace at all times engaged.

"The Lord be with you *all*." *All* His saints, no favourites. He evidently wants every one of us to enjoy this peace every day, every hour. God grant we may.

APPENDIX.

Appendix.

THE ORDER OF EVENTS.

(1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.)

First, the Lord Himself, the Son of God, descends with "a shout"—a signal to His own, as the Greek word signifies. It will not be understood by the world. When the risen Christ spoke to Saul, he alone heard and understood the words spoken (Acts xxii. 9), others only heard a sound (Acts ix. 7). "My sheep hear My voice" (John x. 27).

"The voice of the Archangel"—for it will bear on the destinies of earth.

"The trump of God"—for it will be the consummation of God's heavenly calling, the home-call of the wilderness camp. In an instant, in quick response and joyful obedience to His call, all the dead in Christ—all to whom death was only a "sleep through Jesus"—will rise from their graves. Then immediately, all the living saints will be "changed"—a change equivalent to death and resurrection passing on their mortal bodies, by which they will be fashioned like unto Christ (Phil. iii. 21). Then these two companies will simultaneously rise to meet the descending Lord in the air, and to return and come down with Him when He descends to earth.

This, the expression "to meet" in the Greek suggests, Compare Acts xxvii. 15, and Matthew xxv. 1, which are the only three places where the phrase occurs.

THE RAPTURE.

(See 1 Thessalonians iv. 17.)

It has been objected by some that the word "rapture" is not found in Scripture. Be it so. The word "caught up" or "caught away," and the word "rapture," which is a Latin word, is formed by metatheses from the Greek word which is used in 1 Thessalonians iv. 17. The suddenness and secrecy with which the Lord comes, and the saints are "caught away," is called in 1 Corinthians xv. 51, "a mystery"—that is a secret revealed.

The whole action is to occupy only a single moment, or the twinkle of an eye, or even less time still. For "the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. xv. 52,) denotes the casting of the eyelid down and up, but the Greek word here means only the one or the other. Thus the one moment the living saints will be here, at their daily toil, the bodies of the sleeping saints in their graves, when lo! in a moment, ere the clock has ticked once more, all will be gone—the earth swept of all the saints, and all gathered up to Christ.

THE LORD'S COMING AND HIS APPEARING.

(1 Thess. i. 10; 2 Thess. i. 17.)

Scripture distinguishes between the Lord's coming (or presence), and his appearing. 1 Thessalonians is chiefly

occupied with the former; 2 Thessalonians with the latter. Significantly also, the New Testament closes with a reference to His coming for us as the Morning Star, while the Old Testament ends with a reference to His appearing as the Rising Sun. Surely this variation in itself is adequate proof of the difference between the Church's hope and that of Israel. His coming *for* us may be at any moment, while His appearing *with* us cannot be until prophecy is fulfilled. A period of seven years—the last week of Daniel's seventy (Dan. ix. 27)—must intervene between the two events. After the Lord takes up His people to be with Himself, then that period will begin, during which the events of Revelation, chapters vi. to ix., and chapters xiii. to xviii., will be fulfilled on earth.

To this it has been objected that this makes two second comings. No; only one in two distinct stages. If His first coming was in two stages; first to Bethlehem, then to Calvary, why may not His second coming be in two stages also? First to "the air" for His saints, then to "the earth" with them. At His coming to the air for His saints, the Holy Ghost, who is at present here with the Church, will lift her up into the presence of the Lord, as Eliezer presented Rebekah to Isaac, to be welcomed there by God the Father, who will join the hands of the Bridegroom and the Bride. After "the marriage of the Lamb" has been celebrated in heaven (Rev. xix. 7), He will return to earth accompanied by His saints, to execute judgment on His foes. He appears then as a warrior, riding on a white horse, and His saints, "called and chosen and faithful," accompany Him on white horses as the "armies of heaven" (Rev.

xix. 11-14). So true is it that when He shall appear we "shall appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4). To fail in distinguishing between the Lord's coming, or presence, and His appearing, is to leave yourself open to be misled by political prophets and others, who will tell you that certain things must first be fulfilled before the Lord can come. But rightly divide these two stages, and all is plain.

TIMES AND SEASONS.

(See 1 Thessalonians v. 1.)

"TIMES and seasons" are not connected with our hope. We know not, nor do we wish to know, concerning these. It is a proof of the Lord's confiding love to us that He has not told us the time of His arrival. No loving wife would like the implication that she could not be trusted to be ready, with her hand on the latch of the door, waiting for her husband at any moment. There are many prophetic dates in Scripture, but they have nothing to do with the saints of the present age. They do not fix anything for those who are called with a heavenly calling. Ours is a calling to that region where the measurement of time by sun and moon obtains not. Those who fix dates, and count years, betray their ignorance of the Church's heavenly calling and hope. It is this confounding of the heavenly and earthly, of the calling and hopes of Israel and of the Church, that has been the cause of all the errors made in counting years and dates, and this has raised the scoffer's sneer again and again. Nor is this the worst that has happened in consequence. Alas! the spiritual energies of those who have been beguiled by these vagaries have been numbed,

so that they have ceased to watch for the Lord Himself, and, in many cases, now throw discredit on the truth regarding His coming altogether. Others are engaged scanning the newspapers, for indications of the approach of Antichrist and other signs, instead of with anointed eyes watching for their Lord, and with anointed ears listening for His signal shout, that shall bear them to His presence above.

THE MAN OF SIN.

(2 Thess. ii. 3.)

In the Apostle's days there were already "many antichrists" (see 1 John ii. 18). They had crept in among the saints, and were doing their work. That work was then to get saints to *reject* what was of God. Now it seems to be to incite to the *reception* of that which is false. "The unction"—which is undoubtedly, the Holy Ghost—spoken of by John (see 1 John ii. 20, 27), was to be their safeguard against being seduced by false teachers. The Holy Ghost is the God-sent Teacher, who is to guide into all the truth (John xvi. 13), and thus preserve from what is false.

But "*the* Antichrist" is yet to come. You will never see him if you are a true Christian. You will be in heaven with Christ, before he is manifested. The world is fast preparing for him, but so long as the Church is on earth, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, the "Man of sin" cannot personally appear. The Holy Ghost indwelling the Church is "the Hinderer" mentioned in 2 Thess. ii. 7, when but He lifts the Church from earth to heaven and accompanies it there, the salt will be gone from the

earth, the light gone from the world, the restraint away, so that Satan, who is now, as fast as he can, preparing the world for the coming Man, will have his way then, and all the world shall wonder after the Beast. Even now, many professors are infatuated by the spirit of the age, and are being carried down with that current of boasted progress, out from which shall come "the Man of sin."

ANTICHRIST, OR THE BEAST.

(2 Thess. ii. 9.)

"THE BEAST" (Rev. xiii. 1) is the Roman Emperor of the future. He will be received with acclamation by men who have despised God's lowly Christ, and regarded with wonder and awe by the whole world. But he whom men thus regard, and elect by their suffrage as their Imperial Potentate, is described by God from His throne in the heavens as "The Beast." How different are the estimates of earth from those of heaven! And this monster, raised from among the masses by Satanic power, will be elected by the kings of the future Roman empire as their head and chief. They are to be in subjection to him (Rev. xvii. 12). And this great political ruler of the Roman empire, whose power is derived from Satan (Rev. xiii. 4), will have his ecclesiastical representative in "the False Prophet" (Rev. xix. 20), who has power to work "signs" in the sight of his imperial master, and so deceive men thereby (verses 12-14), that they will worship the Beast (v. 8). Thus we have a trinity of evil—the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet—the Devil's caricature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY.

(2 Thess. ii. 7.)

THE leaven hid by the woman in the meal (Matthew xiii. 33) had begun to work in the apostles' time (Gal. v. 9), and the last glance of the professing Church on earth as represented in the Laodicean state (Rev. iii. 14-16), is characterized by lukewarmness, or a jumble of sacred and worldly things, with excessive pretensions to high condition, while, in the sight of the Lord, it is so utterly disgusting as to be fit only to be vomited out of His mouth. At the Lord's descent into the air, all His true saints will be snatched away from earth to heaven, only the false will remain. These are seen, preachers and hearers alike (compare Matthew vii. 22 with Luke xiii 26), rejected, and disowned by the Lord at His closed door. The "mystery of iniquity," which had up till then been working in secret, restrained by the presence of the Holy Ghost, indwelling so many of God's true saints on the earth, will then be seen in its full manifestation in Babylon the Great, who with unblushing effrontery, wears her full name branded upon her brow—"MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" (Rev. xvii. 3), in guilty alliance with the kings of the earth, seated on the Beast, who is full of names of blasphemy. What an awful consummation of the secularised Christianity of the present time, which is even now busy courting and dallying with the aristocracy of the world, while professing to be the spouse of a rejected Christ! And the inglorious end of this huge system of false Christianity, which is so much thought of and petted now, is to be

trampled under foot, and the last vestige of its existence extirpated, by the hand of those whose patronage it now seeks, and whose support it invokes by its flatteries.

THE COMING IN JUDGMENT.

(2 Thess. ii. 8.)

AFTER the Lord has completed the gathering of His heavenly people, the calling up on high of His saints, He will then resume His dealings with Israel at the point where they were broken off by their rejection and murder of Messiah, and by their rejection of the Holy Ghost (Acts vii. 51-54). An elect remnant of God's earthly people will be persecuted by Antichrist because of their refusal to worship his image. This will be to them "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. xxx. 7); that "great tribulation" of which the Lord foretold them (Matthew xxiv. 21-24). None of the saints of the present dispensation will be on earth during this period. The Lord's own promise is, that they shall be taken out of it (Rev. iii. 10). He does not interfere on earth for His heavenly people. His way is to lift them out of it. But for His earthly people He will interpose for their deliverance, and for the overthrow and utter destruction of their foes. These will be sustained in their refusal to worship the beast, by the hope of their Messiah appearing to deliver them. And when He does come down, He will not come alone, His heavenly people will come with him. Nor will He be perturbed at the nations raging (Psa. ii. 1), and gathering themselves together in battle against Him. What though the chivalry of Europe are massed together under the great rebel Emperor, who leads them on to

"the battle of that great day of God Almighty"! What though they openly seek to make war with the Lamb! He shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Once, as the lowly Lamb of God, He was led to the slaughter; now, as the King of kings and Lord of lords, He comes forth to execute judgment on His foes, and to interpose for the deliverance of His earthly people.

"THE BRIDE, THE LAMB'S WIFE."

After the judgment of the false Church, the great whore, who had "corrupted the earth with her fornication (Rev. xix. 2), the marriage of the Lamb is celebrated in heaven with great joy. It was fitting that this false and shamelessly corrupt system should be exposed and finally disowned, ere the true Bride, the chaste and holy spouse of Christ, should be brought forth and publicly acknowledged.

That the Bride is the Church—that is, the saints of this age, who by the Holy Ghost are even now united to the Glorified Man on the right hand of God there can be no doubt. Who else but these had been "espoused to Christ" (2 Cor. xi. 2), and had shared His rejection here on earth? That there are other saints in heaven besides the Bride, is evident from the fact that some are "called to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev xix. 9). These are not angels, for they had never been "called." They never sinned, and have no part in redemption. And they are not identical with the Bride herself, for they are only "called to the marriage supper." They are the saints of other ages, who, although they had never known on earth

what it was to be united to Christ by the Holy Ghost, have great joy in being there as friends of the Bridegroom (see John iii. 29) whose highest blessing here consists in being the invited guests at His marriage supper. The marriage celebrated in heaven amid adoring hosts, the Lord will then present His glorified saints to the world in company with Him in glory (Col. iii. 3). The time has at last arrived for the once-slain Lamb to assume the sceptre of the world and reign, and He will not reign alone. "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the habitable world to come"; they are superseded by those who for Christ's Name's sake had been scorned, despised, and made as the offscouring of all things. "If we suffer we shall reign."

During the thousand years of millennial glory, she will reign with Christ. Creationwards she appears as "the New Jerusalem," the heavenly city, high above the earth, basking in the beams of glory—"having the glory of God," her light like unto a precious stone crystallizing the earth. Full herself, she becomes the dispenser of that glory to others, beautifying and gladdening creation. The nations walk in her light, which is radiated upon them through her wall. At the close of the millennium, she is seen descending, to become God's tabernacle among men, still bearing the title of "the Bride" as if for ever and ever she will bear the unchanging beauty of youth.

COURSE OF EVENTS IN "THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION."

THE Book of the Revelation traces the onward course of events from the Pentecostal Church in its first love, to the

last stage of Laodicean lukewarmness and self-satisfaction (see chaps. ii. and iii). Then at an unnamed moment, between the events of chapters iii. and iv. the true church is removed from the world to her eternal home.

In the beginning of chapter iv. John sees a door open in heaven, and is caught up in the Spirit. John's action here is symbolic. He is the representative of the Church caught up from earth to heaven, and the first object that fixes his eye is the throne, and the Being that sits upon it. The Throne-Sitter was "like unto a jasper and a sardine stone"—the first and last stones on the breastplate of the High Priest of old. "Sardine" comes from a root which means "Adam," hinting that there is a Man up there. "Jasper" was Benjamin's stone; Benjamin means "Son of my right hand," hinting that He is not there alone. Where Christ is, there the Church shall be. The throne is here seen dressing itself for judgment, the time for which has however hardly come yet. There is a rainbow seen around the throne, the sign of God's covenant with the earth, which is ever before Him (Gen. ix. 13 with Isa. liv. 9, 10).

Round about the throne are seen four-and-twenty elders sitting, crowned, on "thrones" also. (The same word is used as in verse 2). These represent the glorified church as worshippers, seated there in perfect calmness and serenity in the presence of God. The "living creatures" (not "beasts" as in the A. V.) represent the same church in service. Rev. iv. pictures the last moment in heaven, ere God commences by judgment to sweep the earth, and place it on a redemption basis.

Chapter v. shows the title deeds of the world in the hands of the Lamb, whose worth had been attested, and

His claim owned by all in heaven, the church, angels, and all creation, bursting forth in praise and adoration of Him. From chapter vi. to xviii. events on earth ripen; apostate Christianity left on earth at the descent of the Lord into the air for His saints, becomes more and more corrupt, until, in spite of its plausible pretentions, it is wiped off the face of the earth.

In chapter xix. all in heaven rejoice that Divine judgment has fallen on Babylon the great, and accompanied by His risen and glorified saints, the Lord goes forth as a Warrior, to take vengeance on His foes, and deliver the remnant of His earthly people who amid unprecedented trials had waited for Him.

Chapters xx., xxi. 3, trace the onward course of events subsequent to the Lord's return to earth and during the millennium. Satan is bound. Now he is the world's "god" and "prince": *i.e.*, its religious and religious head. He is at present in the heavenlies (Eph. vi. 12): at the Lord's coming *for* His saints, and their rapture to heaven, he will be cast down to earth (Rev. xii. 9 with Rom. xvi. 20). At Christ's appearing *with* His saints Satan is cast into the abyss, or bottomless pit (Rev. xx. 3) where he remains throughout the millennium. Then after a final effort to lead men after him, his career is suddenly ended, and he is cast into "the lake of fire"—his eternal doom (Rev. xx. 10).

Chapter xxi. 1-9 gives a view of the Eternal State, and chapter xxi. 9 to the end, goes back, giving a view of some aspects of the millennial glory. "The Bride the Lamb's Wife" is the glorified Church, seen in her relation to Christ, who suffered for her, and with whom and for whom she suffered on earth. Now the Bride-

groom and the Bride are seen in the same glory. As "The New Jerusalem" the Church is seen in her relation *to* the millennial earth. Creationwards she appears as "a city" "having the glory of God" and crystallizing with her light the world below. The closing words are from the Lord Himself, thrice repeated, "I come quickly," and the heart response of the Bride indwelt by the Spirit is "Come." Oh to be ever on the tip-toe of expectation, to welcome Him! "Come, Lord Jesus."

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